

*A Dream of Zion: Americans Talk about Why Israel Matters to Them*  
Rep. Henry A. Waxman

My connection to Israel began as a child. I remember the exuberance of my parents and relatives that a Jewish country had been born. The blue *pushke* of the Jewish National Fund became a permanent feature in our home, collecting coins to plant trees and build infrastructure in the budding state.

My ties grew even stronger when my daughter moved there to raise her family. When my granddaughter was nine she wrote me a Father's Day note: "Dear Grandpa, Happy Father's Day. You are a wonderful Grandpa and a wonderful Congressman. You show the whole world that you love Israel so much and are trying to help and that means a lot to us and also to Israel."

As a Congressman, I have been proud to have played a role in many of the events that impacted Israel in the last thirty years. In 1977, my wife Janet and I sat in amazement listening to President Sadat's speech before the Knesset extending his hand in peace. I attended the White House ceremonies for the Camp David Accords; the signing of the ill-fated Oslo Agreement; and the dinner in honor of diplomatic relations between Israel and Jordan with Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein. We were in Israel for the difficult disengagement from Gaza and again last summer as Hezbollah rockets rained down on Israeli cities.

I have been especially proud of my efforts to help win the freedom of Jewish refugees seeking a haven in the Jewish State. Janet and I fought for the freedom of Soviet Jews, visited *refusniks*, pressured Soviet leaders to allow them to leave, and celebrated the first flights to Ben Gurion. Janet was instrumental in the effort to help Syrian Jews emigrate. We were in Israel as the airlifts of Ethiopians arrived in Operation Solomon. It is astounding to see how modern Israeli society is truly a reflection of the varied traditions and trajectories of Jewish history.

The fact is that Israelis have taken many risks to build a peaceful future and fulfill the mandate of a Jewish homeland. Despite a backdrop of wars, boycotts, and constant regional turmoil, Israel has managed to generate a vigorous economy, a vibrant democracy, a robust military and leading advances in technology and science. The majority of Americans value our strategic partnership with Israel because they appreciate these sacrifices. They recognize the need for allies and expertise in the fight against Islamic terrorism, Iran's nuclear ambitions and a distorted United Nations system that uniformly criticizes Israel while ignoring pressing international threats.

Unfortunately, it took almost 20 years for the United Nations to abandon the canard that Zionism is a form of racism. Hopefully it won't take as long for the international community to acknowledge that anti-Zionism is patently anti-Semitic.

Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish State. As Americans and as Jews it is important that we honor its origins and defend its future.

**Public Service Award on the Occasion of the  
100th Anniversary of The United Synagogue of Conservative Jewry**  
(The audience is the Rabbinical Assembly)

People sometimes ask me whether I'm a better Congressman because I am Jewish or a better Jew because I am a Congressman. I hope it's a little of both.

Our country is founded on the separation of church and state, but Rabbis and congressman happen to have a lot in common. We share a dedication to public service. We are inspired by values that empower us to help uplift our communities.

The mitzvah of *Tikkun Olam* is a commandment to repair the world. Here in Congress it is an outlook that underscores the importance of

- Safeguards for the environment and standards for clean drinking water.
- Preservation of clean air and natural resources
- The protection of beautiful open spaces like the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve from oil exploration.

The mitzvah of *Tzedakah*, the principle of helping those who are vulnerable and in need, is at the heart of my work to

- Help seniors afford their prescription drugs
- Make sure that children have access to health care, the homeless are sheltered, and the hungry are fed

*Pikuach Nefesh*, the commandment to save lives, compels us to

- Work against tobacco marketing to children.
- Encourage the development of groundbreaking vaccines and treatments for disease.
- Make sure that nursing homes abide by standards that preserve dignity and a proper level of care.

And of course we share a commitment to Israel, which is at the heart of Judaism and the center of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

September 11 has placed Rabbis, teachers, parents, and public officials in the extraordinarily difficult task of trying to reassure constituent, congregations, and families in a time of fear and distress.